Parks: The Living Link

The 1975 B. Y. Morrison Memorial Lecture

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE · U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The B. Y. Morrison Memorial Lectureship was established by the Agricultural Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to recognize outstanding accomplishments in the science and practice of ornamental horticulture and other environic sciences . . . to encourage their wider application to improve the quality of life . . . and to stress the urgency of preserving and enhancing natural beauty in man's surroundings.

Lecturers meeting these standards of achievement and capable of giving effective voice to vital environmental messages are chosen from nominations submitted to a formal selection panel established by the Department. Nominations are obtained from scientific societies and other professional associations, foundations, universities, and previous lecturers. Each platform is selected to provide a distinguished audience, and to promote an exchange of ideas among leaders working to improve our environment. The texts of these lectures frequently are reprinted in popular and professional publications.

B. Y. Morrison (1891–1966) was a many-faceted man–a scientist, landscape architect, administrator, plant explorer, author, and lecturer. A pioneer in ornamental horticulture, he was the first Director of the National Arboretum, today one of the world's great botanic research and education centers. He gave the American public dozens of new ornamental plants, including the well-known Glenn Dale azaleas. He did much to advance the science of botany in the United States.

Morrison's plant exploration trips to the Orient, Europe, and Latin America made him a nationally known authority on foreign plants. He was one of the first Department officials to encourage introduction of ornamentals. His popular publications were among the first to promote plants to enhance the beauty of the land.

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by Nash Castro
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I would like to start this afternoon by congratulating you on your theme—One Hundred Years of Green Survival. One hundred is a nice round number that lends itself to celebrations, and green is a lovely color.

I would like, also, to congratulate the Agricultural Research Service for its vision and wisdom in founding this important forum 8 years ago. Each year, through the B. Y. Morrison Memorial Lecture, the Agricultural Research Service brings to the attention of the Nation the priceless treasure our natural environment represents—and parks are a vital, living part of that environment.

I am grateful for this splendid opportunity to talk with you about my favorite subject, parks, and for giving me the chance to present them in perhaps a slightly different context—that of living links.

The idea that parks can be living links between a succession of pasts and futures is ambitious at best, perhaps even presumptuous. Yet I ardently maintain their worthiness for such a role.

My intention is to use the good old standard time line as the thread of continuity, starting with the basic earth from which parks have sprung. We will watch parks sprout, define themselves, and fill every available niche provided by nature and her most remarkable of all creatures—humans. And then we will cast a confident eye to the future, for a glimpse of where these living links might lead us.

Along the way I hope you may sense the analogy between modern man and an adolescent truant—each out to put distance between himself and his home base without yet having demonstrated his ability to build an acceptable nest for himself. The rebellious runaway's abandoned bedroom shows an embarrassing resemblance to many a modern city—messy, disordered, virtually defying habitation. With few notable exceptions, a livable city today is still more of a happy accident than the predictable result of planning and implementation. The whole thing speaks of a need to go back to the drawing board, and I hope to show that parks are places to do just that.

When a runaway realizes his inability to cope, he heads for home. But as Thomas Wolfe has told us, "You can't go home again," and we have to admit that the earth today is not the same earth we knew in our childhood. Embedded in a world whose fossil fuel tanks are running dry, we tend to whistle, "There's no place like home," and at the same time to ask ourselves, "What *is* a home?"

The movement today in society is away from the false, the shoddy, the ersatz, and toward the last things we touched that smacked of quality and life . . . . soil, sun, air, and water. It is as though we were seeking to touch base again, to reassure ourselves that we do indeed belong here.

Parks in the Solar Energy Chain

Your life is horticulture—mine is parks. You and I have known each other for a long time. We have worked hard and well together and we know that we are among the luckiest of people—those who work with and within nature. We form a uniquely "plugged-in" sector of society—plugged in to the ultimate, unfailing source of energy, into the sturdy systems of earth that since time immemorial have provided our living link with the sun. These systems are the home base, the dependable containers of all the mind-boggling complexity and diversity that maximize the sun's energy and make Earth our only home address.

The sun, as the source of all life, has been worshiped since our prehistoric ancestors first became self-aware. But at the other end of the solar energy chain sits that little green miracle, chlorophyll. And who is to say that the power and glory of this tiny engine does not match that of the sun? Everything that breathes on earth is dependent on chlorophyll. Of all the many wonders of earth, chlorophyll alone is hitched directly to the sun; and you and I are blessed to be dealers in this enduring green magic.

Donald Culross Peattie, the poet of photosynthesis, nearly four decades ago foresaw the day when flagging fossil fuels would bring home forcefully to man the inseparable oneness of ecology and economy. In 1939, he wrote: "The source of all wealth is the peasantry of grass."

This is the kind of homage that informed and sensitive people instinctively pay the earth, and you and I both know how someone like Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson can strike this responsive chord in the Nation at large. It was Mrs. Johnson who presented the first B. Y. Morrison Memorial Lecture in 1968. She found it the most natural thing in the world to speak in the name and honor of that brilliant horticulturist. She and you and I and the man we gather annually to honor—all have chosen to live our lives as close working partners with chlorophyll.

All of us here today can understand Peattie, the botanist, as he describes his love affair with nature:

"Every day, every hour of all the ages, as each continent, and equally important, each ocean rolls into sunlight, chlorophyll ceaselessly creates. Not figuratively, but literally . . . . One instant there are a gas and water, as lifeless as the core of earth or as the chill of space; and the next they are living tissue . . . . Life, in short, synthesized . . . . Only when man has done as much, may he call himself the equal of a weed."

Man and Nature

I have read with compelling interest and deep admiration the lectures of my distinguished predecessors on this platform, and I have found in them several observations relevant to my own theme of parks as links between man and his environment, as expressions of man and nature, and as way stations along the line of continuity that links wilderness to that still unrealized idea—an acceptable civilized nest for modern man.

Rene Dubos, with his genius for getting to the heart of any problem, left an echo in the 1972 B. Y. Morrison Lecture that could form the heart of my own partisan

plea for parks. He addressed himself to both wilderness and what he called "humanized earth," and this defines precisely the present range of parks, as well as pointing the way that parks and humans together may yet find a more livable working fit of man and nature.

Dr. Dubos paid tribute to untouched nature, the wilderness enclaves that we have come to value as containers of secrets—knowledge we may yet have need of. He made no claim for wilderness as the natural habitat of man. We have come too far since we left the world of instinct and sunshine-supported energy chains to feel entirely comfortable or at ease in a world where only footprints speak of man. We fulfill ourselves by shaping nature, in response to nature's shaping us. We are most at ease in systems that bespeak the harmony that man and nature can express. So far, that harmony has come mostly by chance, intuition, trial and error; but now that we tentatively seek to retrace our steps, we discover that there was method to our progression. There are rules to be uncovered and followed, and there are places we established along the way—places that can help us find our way back to the point where health and sanity and common sense began to elude us.

Those places are called parks. They are among the lucky accidents of our past, sturdy signs of where we have been and reliable guideposts to a better way we might yet go.

Growth of the Park Idea

In 1872, with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park, the modern park idea was off and running worldwide. But while we are paying tribute to the idea of parks, let it be said that parks are more than a

notion that first ran through the heads of men like Pierre Charles L'Enfant, Frederick Law Olmsted, John Muir, and others. There remains that tough link that must be forged between mind and muscle, between thought and action, between dream and reality. Those who "went the mile" for the park idea also deserve honorable mention. The Boston Commons, Central and Rock Creek Parks—these historic firsts—are monuments to the dreams of a few farsighted men. But the thousands of scenic, recreational, historic, and cultural parks that have sprung up and taken deep root all over the United States and the world are living testimony to the need felt by people for all the things parks do so well. And so people have provided that living link.

People went further. They formed effective groups, organizing themselves to accomplish pieces of the overall task, shoring up weak places in the actualization process wherever such weaknesses were seen as threatening the park idea, applying the most advanced thought and techniques to the planning and programming of parks and their personnel. The Conservation Foundation, the Wilderness Society, the National Recreation and Park Association, the Audubon Society—these are some of the "do-ers."

By 1972, when delegates from 80 countries and 6 continents gathered at Yellowstone and Grant Teton National Parks to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the park idea, the nations of the world could proudly count more than 1,200 national parks or equivalent reserves—monumental testimony to the survival value of the park idea as it is perceived by the people of the world. In that assembly, which gathered under the title of Second World Conference on National Parks, the future of the

park idea could be read. The conference was attended by physical scientists, natural scientists, social scientists, conservationists, governors, members of Congress, educators, game managers, land managers, planners—the entire spectrum of specialists within the park idea.

The proceedings of that historic session are like a blueprint of the past, where the park idea has grown to include "everything from wilderness areas to heavy tourist-use areas," in the conference words of Dr. Joseph Fisher, who hotly defended this broad range and advocated carrying-capacity studies suited to every type of park use.

What are the things that parks preserve and perpetuate so beautifully toward the mutual betterment of humanity and its habitat? Being models of what we instinctively feel is good and right, they invite our human ingenuity to find new tools for maintaining this goodness and rightness. To our credit, it can be said that we have been responding in just this creative, innovative, survival-oriented way. A case in point is the Nature Conservancy—organized to identify and acquire, for holding, special areas whose primary value to society is their use as parks, in the broadest sense.

Social, economic, and governmental processes often leave gaps between the recognition of a valuable piece of potential parkland and the ultimate fulfillment of that land's highest destiny. The Conservancy stepped into this gap and, like a healthy organism, adapted itself at once to the empty social niche.

Since then, the Nature Conservancy has continued to adapt, filling other associated functions that are helping us slowly and democratically to shape our land use patterns and policies to changing social needs—so that land use in general and parks in particular will continue to be responsive to the needs of people.

Instruments for Social Betterment

First then, we have parks serving as environmental vignettes of superlative quality—models for planners and builders seeking a better balance between man and nature.

Second, parks can "re-create" us, in the deepest and most profound sense of the word from which "recreation" springs. Former National Park Service Director George B. Hartzog, Jr., once said he wished that recreation would always be spelled with a hyphen to underscore the re-creative role of parks as regenerators of human vitality, rechargers of human spirit, restorers of mental health, and re-energizers of human resolve.

And third, parks are scientific laboratories. The wilderness enclaves protected under the park idea are more than places to return and look for our roots. They are research areas for extracting survival secrets from successful systems that have been operating longer than our lifetime as a species. They are repositories of genes that may yet prove of vital concern to future generations of man. Even though we prefer to live in humanized environments, wilderness still contains intelligence that can be used to manage the earth so as to create what Dubos called "environments which are ecologically stable, economically profitable, esthetically rewarding, and favorable to the continued growth of civilization." Which was his way of saying: "a way to go home to a habitable, comfortable, workable nest for man."

Another phrase from that 1972 Morrison Lecture struck a chord in me. It was Dr. Dubos' reference to the aspect of man's fundamental being that is "still in resonance with cosmic events." He refers in his lyrical prose to the

mystic quality which cannot be found in an orchard or a garden, but only in "the thunderous silence of deep canyons, the solitude of high mountains, the luminosity of the desert."

It is in this resonance that the deepest kind of educational experience can occur, and that brings me to the fourth way in which parks furnish living links—as purveyors of environmental education. In parks can be felt, and made consciously apparent to visitors, the interaction between man and the environment that grew him, wraps and maintains him, and is constantly interchanging with him on the way to whatever future they act out together. Man and his environment: parks are splendid classrooms for developing awareness of all that this means, for enjoying it at its best, for studying it as the process unfolds.

Links With the Future

And so parks, I suggest, are hubs, nexuses, depots, and way stations where past and future are coming together, where wilderness and urban clots co-exist, where utter disregard and careful stewardship of earth's natural systems are acted out, where people come to learn and draw inspiration, where all the rewards and problems of man and nature exist in microcosm, somehow seeming more manageable because they tend to pile up and occur at a slightly slower pace.

Learning to manage our forward motion through time at a speed consistent with our ability to control ourselves is a problem that is being tackled in parks as it is elsewhere. The usefulness of parks as places to mount this long overdue action is evident in the activity of those out at the frontier of the park idea.

A case in point is the MAB Programme, which stands for Man and the Biosphere--one of UNESCO's superbly creative efforts to keep earth a fit home for its creatures. Christian Herter, Special Assistant to the U.S. Secretary of State for Environmental Affairs, set the tone of the MAB Coordinating Council meeting at the State Department in Washington, D.C., last September by calling for immediate action on the launching of global cooperative research and education projects.

Mr. Herter promised full U.S. support for MAB and backed his promise by announcing that 20 areas in the United States had been designated as biosphere reserves, in conformity with the criteria laid down under MAB. It isn't surprising to find that the 20 areas included the Everglades National Park in Florida and the Noatak National Arctic Range in Alaska.

The aim of this project is a direct extension into the future of the tremendously viable park idea: in this case, the establishment of a worldwide network of biosphere reserves, or protected natural areas, for the conservation of valuable plant and animal genetic strains, and as places where scientific research for safeguarding the global environment can be carried out.

By the end of 1974, 29 countries had pledged support for the project, and areas specifically designated included a mountain region in Austria, the Moore House National Reserve in the United Kingdom, the 120-square-mile Camargue National Reserve in the Rhone delta of France, and a 58,000-acre area on the Island of Mindoro in the Philippines.

Making use of this network of biosphere reserves will be an interdisciplinary network of specialists, representing a balance between the natural and the social sciences and reflecting the basic premise of MAB—that governments are very much a part of the biosphere and that the cultural patterns and social structures

they represent must be a part of any attempt to understand and deal with the evolving world of man and the biosphere.

So we find one more long, continuous line running through the parks—a line from the simplest nature walk and campfire slide show through the environmental study areas, and on out to the equivalent reserves of the world.

Parks—Places for Problem Solving

It is honestly hard to imagine a problem today that cannot be discerned within the context of some park, somewhere, and that cannot be seen more in truth and entirety within that context than the same problem in a more cluttered and less natural situation. The things we want to stop and the things we want to start—they all occur inside as well as outside of parks. Those that occur inside of parks have the advantage of being somewhat buffered. The problems are not so deeply ingrained and not so much part and parcel of the overall park process that they cannot be understood and dealt with. The opportunities are like a seedbed or a greenhouse flat—there to be fed and nurtured and brought to transplantable life and then tried out in the tougher environment of cities and suburbs.

The toughest decisions facing us today are land use decisions. They may present themselves under other names—energy, employment, housing. But while the emphasis will be on ownership and property and all the attendant rights these social words entail, the ultimate stake is that irreplaceable basic for which this planet offers no substitute—land.

The tenuous, often troubled history of man's attempts to grow right is a history based on land. As more and more of us are involved in earth's problems, we find less and less room to act out our answers. It is the closing in on itself of man's search for his own best habitat that is powering such movements as the Man and the Biosphere Program and such bold, innovative strokes as the Nature Conservancy's recent report on the preservation of natural diversity.

Two months ago, the Conservancy recommended to the Department of the Interior a nationwide system of ecological reserves to coordinate the preservation of all natural areas now under the protection of the Federal, State, local, and private sectors. Such a nationwide system would represent the full array of North American ecosystems through an inventory program, a registry, and certain safeguards.

In this way, vital genetic material will be less likely to slip through the cracks in our system and disappear forever from the earth. As we gain a better understanding of our environment, I recall something Aldo Leopold is reputed to have said: "The first prerequisite of intelligent tinkering is to save all the pieces."

As the forces for purely consumptive use of land grow and exert their pressures on nature and society alike, there is growing alongside them this set of enlightened alternatives—movements to protect and preserve and perpetuate the opportunities that remain, and to do this without first demanding exactly why.

The wise and humble idea that there may be something "out there" that we don't already know—something absolutely essential to our well-being, perhaps even to our survival, precious options for future good growth—this is part of the power behind these creative land use movements.

Thus we have two sides of the park coin: (1) the

preservation of the best opportunities for perpetuating nature at its finest, and (2) opportunities for working out the best matches of man and nature, to the ongoing betterment of both. If parks are used as settings for aesthetic and spiritual uplift, as environments for exercising the muscles and minds of visitors, as laboratories for learning more about both parks and the people whose presence makes them parks, then we will be adding our uniquely human bit to the forging of strong, living links between man and his world, between the past and the future.

More and more of our questions are concerned with the growing masses of humanity as they relate to the shrinking open spaces of land, and so naturally much of our most vital research involves either directly or indirectly the so-called "carrying capacity" of earth. Park planners and managers are already well into this problem in our own areas of concern.

Last year on World Environment Day, Russell Peterson addressed himself directly to this question by proposing a Declaration of Interdependence—a concept that the Administration has echoed and underscored. Mr. Peterson suggested it as an apt basis for a Bill of Ecological Rights, and I should like to close this address by offering it as a fine credo for those who see parks as among man's finest opportunities for strengthening the human chain of continuity through living environmental links:

"We the people of Planet Earth, with respect for the dignity of each human life, with concern for future generations, with growing appreciation of our relation to our environment, with recognition of limits to our resources and with need for adequate food, air, water, shelter, health, protection, justice and self-fulfillment, hereby declare our interdependence and resolve to work together in brotherhood and in harmony with our environment to enhance the quality of life everywhere."

Mr. Nash Castro, General Manager of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, is a distinguished spokesman for excellence in the environment.

Born in Nogales, Arizona, Nash Castro has completed a 30-year career in the National Park Service. He served as assistant administrator of Hawaii National Park from 1949 to 1955, and then was appointed chief of administration for the Midwest Regional Office of the National Park Service. In the 1960's, he became director of parks in the National Capital Region, Washington, D.C. During this period, he was an architect of the Beautification Program that changed the face of our Nation's Capital and provided an example for other urban areas.

In 1969 he left Federal service to become General Manager of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission. From his headquarters at Bear Mountain State Park, New York, Mr. Castro now manages a system of parks that begins in New Jersey, across the Hudson from Manhattan, and extends north about 40 miles to Bear Mountain and west into Sullivan and Ulster Counties. This 75,000-acre system consists of 23 parks, including five historical sites, and hosts nine million visitors a year.

Lecturer and author of "The Land of Pele" (1953), an illustrated monograph on the history of Hawaii National Park, Mr. Castro speaks with authority about the problems of protecting wilderness areas, the complexity of park management, and the need for environmental education.

He received the Interior Department's highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award (1966), and the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society's Pugsley Medal for excellence in park management (1970). Mr. Castro is a former trustee of the National Recreation and Park Association and was appointed national chairman of the Committee for the Lyndon B. Johnson Memorial Grove on the Potomac in 1973.

Mr. Castro was the first administrator and is now a member of the board of directors of the White House Historical Association. He was the first executive director and is now a trustee of the Society for a More Beautiful National Capital, Inc. He is also on the board of trustees for the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society and the Rockland, N.Y., Center for the Arts.

Previous Lecturers and Cosponsoring Organizations

1968 Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson; American Institute of Architects, Portland, Oregon, June 26.

1969 Prof. Patrick Horsbrugh, creator of the Graduate Program in Environic Studies, Notre Dame University; General Federation of Women's Clubs, Cleveland, Ohio, June 3.

1970 Dr. Arie J. Haagen-Smit, Chairman, President's Task Force on Air Pollution; American Society of Landscape Architects, Williamsburg, Virginia, April 28.

1971 Mr. Ian L. McHarg, Chairman of the Graduate Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania; The Thirty-sixth North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, Portland, Oregon, March 10.

1972 Dr. Rene Dubos, Professor Emeritus of The Rockefeller University; American Association for the Advancement of Science, Washington, D.C., December 29.

1973 Dr. John P. Mahlstede, Professor of Horticulture, Iowa State University; 28th Congress of the American Horticultural Society, New Orleans, Louisiana, October 6.

1974 Ms. Barbara Ward (Lady Jackson), President, The International Institute for Environmental Affairs; The Fortieth Annual National Planning Conference of The American Society of Planning Officials, Chicago, Illinois, May 12.

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